Claims:

1. Viral interleukin-6 (v-IL-6), which can be obtained by recombinant expression of the DNA of ~~HHV-8~~ human herpes virus type 8 ("HHV-8")

2. A polypeptide, which can be obtained by recombinant expression of the DNA of HHV-8, and which comprises the amino acid sequence ~~displayed in~~ (SEQ ID NO: 2) of fig. 2.

3. A polypeptide having the amino acid sequence ~~displayed in~~ (SEQ ID NO: 2) of fig. 2.

4. A fragment of v-IL-6, having the capability of binding to an ~~IL-6~~ interleukin-6 ("IL-6") receptor and comprising the amino acid sequence (residues 87-105 of SEQ ID NO:2) GFNEtsCLkKLadGFFEFE.

5. A fragment as claimed in claim 4, which essentially ~~comprises~~ consists of the amino acid sequence (residues 87-105 of SEQ ID NO:2) GFNEtsCLkKLadGFFEFE.

6. A fragment as claimed in claim 4 ~~or 5~~, which binds to a human IL-6 receptor.

7. Mutants and variants of v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 1, ~~or of the polypeptide as claimed in claim 2,~~ which mutants and variants are obtained by conventional amino acid substitutions or deletions, with the proviso that these mutants and variants are functionally equivalent to v-IL-6.

8. ~~Fragments~~ A fragment of the v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 1, ~~or the polypeptide as claimed in claim 2 or 3,~~ characterized in that ~~they~~ it is able to competively ~~inhibit~~ the biological activity of IL-6 in a suitable assay system.

9. An isolated nucleic acid coding for v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 1.

10. An isolated nucleic acid coding for the polypeptide as claimed in claim 2.

11. An isolated nucleic acid having the nucleotide sequence ~~displayed in~~ fig. 2.

12. An isolated nucleic acid, hybridizing under ~~stringent~~ conditions to the nucleic acid as claimed in ~~one or more of the claims 9 to 11~~, encoding functional v-IL-6.

13. Monoclonal or polyclonal antibodies ~~directed against~~ v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 1 ~~or the polypeptide as claimed in claim 2 and/or 3.~~

14. Testkit for the detection of v-IL-6 in a sample, comprising an antibody as claimed in claim ~~13.~~

15. Testkit for the detection of antibodies against v-IL-6, comprising v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 1 and/or the polypeptide as claimed in claim 2 or 3 or both, claims 2 and 3, and/or mutants and variants of v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 7, and/or fragments of v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 4-6 or 8.

16. Testkit for the detection of v-IL-6 DNA or RNA, comprising a nucleic ~~acid~~ as claimed in ~~one or more of the claims 9 to 12~~.

17. A medicament comprising as an active ingredient the antibody as claimed in claim 13.

18. A medicament comprising as an active ingredient v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 1 and/or the polypeptide as claimed in claim 2 or 3, and/or mutants and variants of v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 7, and/or fragments of v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 4-6 or 8.

19. A medicament comprising as an active ingredient the nucleic acid as claimed in in one or more of claims 9 to 12.

20. A cell culture growth medium, comprising ~~as an additional active ingredient~~ v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 1 ~~, or the polypeptide as claimed in claim 2 or 3, or mutants and variants as claimed in claim 7, or fragments as claimed in claim 8, or mixtures of these substances~~

21. A process of manufacturing v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 1, or the polypeptide as claimed in claim 2 or 3, or mutants and variants as claimed in claim 7, or fragments as claimed in claim 4-6 or 8.

22. A process of manufacturing a medicament, wherein v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 1, or the polypeptide as claimed in claim 2 or 3, or mutants and variants as claimed in claim 7, or fragments as claimed in claim 8 are combined with suitable excipients and/or other auxilliary compounds.

23. A process of manufacturing a medicament comprising as an active ingredient monoclonal or polyclonal antibodies directed against v-IL-6, or a polypeptide comprising v-IL-6, or mutants, variants or fragments of v-IL-6, or a nucleic acid encoding v-IL-6 for the treatment of kaposi sarcoma, Castleman's disease, multiple myeloma, kidney cell carcinoma, mesangial proliferative glomerulonephritis or B cell lymphoma.

24 An process of diagnosing an HHV-8 infection comprising the in vitro detection of v-IL-6 antigen, v-IL-6 DNA, v-IL-6 RNA or antibodies against v-IL-6.

25. A process of diagnosing the HHV-8 associated disorders kaposi sarcoma, Castleman's disease or body cavity based lymphomas (BCBL) through the diagnosis of an HHV-8 infection as claimed in claim 24.

26. A process of growing cells in culture, characterized in that v-IL-6 as claimed in claim 1, or the polypeptide as claimed in claim 2 or 3, or mutants and variants as claimed in claim 7, or fragments as claimed in claim 4-6 or 8, or mixtures of these compounds are contained in the growth medium.

27. The process as claimed in claim 26, wherein the cells are B-lymphocytes, hybridomas, hemopoetic cells or endothelial cells.